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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [EAID](#) [SY](#) [IR](#) [LE](#)  
SUBJECT: LEBANON: GEAGEA TELLS S/P GORDON MAINTAINING MARCH  
14 MOMENTUM CRUCIAL AFTER DOHA

REF: A. BEIRUT 733  
[1](#)B. BEIRUT 759

Classified By: CDA Michele J. Sison for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

SUMMARY

[1](#)1. (C) Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea told Policy Planning Director David Gordon that the momentum is now with the March 14-led majority after the selection of PM Siniora over the opposition's objections. According to Geagea, for the majority to capitalize on this momentum, Siniora needs to select "strong Christians" who are popular, especially to counter opposition stalwart Michel Aoun and his Christian supporters. Geagea also said it is important to withdraw the investigation process of the Special Tribunal and proceed with the prosecution stage before the 2009 parliamentary elections, which could result in the formation of a government less supportive of the Tribunal.

[1](#)2. (C) Geagea commented that a national dialogue between the majority and opposition would be a good venue in which to place Hizballah on the "defensive" on its arms, and also believes President Sleiman would be willing to play a "moderator role" in such discussions. Geagea hopes the U.S. would put more pressure on Israel to withdrawal from the Sheba'a farms area and believes such a move would be a public "boost" for the Lebanese government, especially vis-a-vis Hizballah. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Visiting Director of the Office of Policy Planning (S/P) David Gordon, his chief of staff Todd Deatherage, Special Assistant Whitley Wolman, and the Charge, accompanied by PolOff, met with Lebanese Forces leader Samir Geagea and his advisor Elie Khoury at Geagea's residence in Maarab on June 3. Geagea said the most crucial thing for March 14 is maintaining its momentum after the selection of Fouad Siniora to serve as Prime Minister, which according to Geagea is a significant victory for March 14 over the opposition. Geagea told S/P Director Gordon that now was the time for March 14 to launch a political "counterattack" to improve its position and put the Aoun/Hizballah-led opposition on the defensive.

HEAVYWEIGHT CHRISTIANS IN THE NEW CABINET

[1](#)4. (C) Geagea said he is pushing hard for "heavyweight" Christian representation in the new cabinet. Geagea

explained that he did not want PM Siniora to appoint Christian "technocrats who lack a grassroots political base," such as Culture Minister Tarek Mitri or Finance Minister Jihad Azour, both currently caretaker ministers as Siniora forms a new cabinet, into the Christian designated cabinet positions. Geagea said a statement needed to be made about the "strong character" of the new government Siniora is forming, and that character would be determined by the type of Christian representation in it.

¶15. (C) Geagea emphasized that PM Siniora really needs to appoint ministers that will solidify March 14 support, especially among Christians. Geagea said selecting "popular" Christians who will be seen as strong proponents for the Christian community is important. He pointed out that under the 16-11-3 cabinet agreed at Doha, (Ref A), the majority will get sixteen out of the thirty cabinet positions. Geagea asked, "why not make the selection of these cabinet positions count?" Geagea said now is the time to counter opposition MP Michel Aoun and his image as the "defender of the Christians," and Siniora's selection of strong Christians for the cabinet is the best place to start. (Note: After the meeting, Poloff talked to Geagea's advisor Elie Khoury on who these "Christians might be." Khoury mentioned MP Boutros Harb as one example. However, we subsequently heard that Mansour el-Bon had been designated as the choice of the Christian group that Harb would have represented. End note.)

GEAGEA FRUSTRATED BY SLOW PROGRESS OF  
SPECIAL TRIBUNAL

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¶16. (C) Geagea believes it is important for the Special Tribunal, which is investigating the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and related killings, to move forward quickly with indictments before the 2009 parliamentary elections. Geagea stressed his frustration over the slow progress of the Tribunal. He pointed out that the prosecution phase had not started and no specific charges on suspected individuals had been brought forward. Geagea said time is crucial for the Tribunal and UNIIIC Commissioner Daniel Bellemare needs to complete his investigation and name suspects, even if "no Syrians are among the persons charged." Geagea said if the prosecution phase is not set in motion before the 2009 parliamentary elections, the election outcome could bring about a less supportive government and delay the Tribunal process.

¶17. (C) S/P Director Gordon told Geagea he understood Geagea's concerns over the Tribunal's seemingly slow progress and agreed on the importance of the prosecution phase beginning before the 2009 parliamentary elections. However, Bellemare's investigation is still ongoing. Gordon said it is important to get the transitional period between investigation to prosecution right and to make sure it meets international justice standards. Gordon added that "you can not rush the timeframe."

GEAGEA: SLEIMAN SHOULD PRESIDE OVER  
NATIONAL DIALOGUE

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¶18. (C) Geagea said newly-elected President Sleiman is in a good position, as the "consensus" political leader, to be the moderator over a national dialogue between the majority and the opposition, which was part of the Doha agreement (Ref A). Geagea said the majority would make sure the primary issue on the table would be Hizballah's arms. After a recent conversation with President Sleiman, Geagea said Sleiman is "open" to such a national dialogue process and is "flexible" about supporting the idea. Geagea believes such a dialogue process, under the auspices of the Arab League, would put Hizballah on the defensive and find it hard not to discuss

its arms in such a venue.

¶9. (C) Geagea also said it is important that such a national dialogue process take place before the new government's ministerial statement, which is given shortly after the cabinet formation and details the goals of the incoming government. According to Geagea, PM Siniora has no "legal" time requirements placed upon him to announce the ministerial statement and he could wait to after the national dialogue is completed. Geagea added, if the national dialogue was even slightly successful in dealing with Hizballah's arms, it could be added officially to the ministerial statement, thus, making the limitation on Hizballah's arms part of the new government's ministerial goals.

RESOLVING SHEBA'A FARMS WOULD GIVE  
REAL BOOST TO GOVERNMENT  
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¶10. (C) Geagea said after the Doha agreement, the "battlefield has switched from fighting in the streets to politics" and the majority must develop a strategy that will improve its position over the Hizballah-led opposition under such circumstances. Geagea pointed out that resolving the Sheba'a Farms issue and getting Israel to withdrawal its forces from Sheba'a would be a major boost for the government and its supporters. Geagea said he knows that Sheba'a Farms is a small issue within the larger picture of U.S. foreign policy in the region, but said the U.S. is missing a "major opportunity" to publicly support the Siniora government by not pressuring Israel to withdrawal from Sheba'a farms.

¶11. (C) According to Geagea, Israel sees giving the Sheba'a farms area back to Lebanon as rewarding Hizballah, rather than resolving a thorny political problem. Geagea finds it hard to understand Israel's thinking on Sheba'a farms. He wondered why Israel is willing to "negotiate" with Hizballah

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over the release of Hizballah prisoners for Israeli soldiers' "body parts." Geagea said this makes no logical sense, Israel is rewarding Hizballah's past bad behavior. (Note: Geagea's reference is to the June 1 release of accused Hizballah informer Nassim Nisr by the Israeli government. According to regional press reports, the Israeli government received IDF soldier's body parts from the July-August 2006 war from Hizballah in exchange for Nisr's release. End note.)

SUPPORT FOR LEBANON  
IS BIPARTISAN  
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¶12. (C) S/P Director Gordon explained that his office is responsible for developing long-term planning in U.S. foreign policy. He noted that this continuity process is particularly important when there is a change in administrations. Gordon emphasized the bipartisan support that Lebanon has in the U.S. government and that this support will stay strong no matter who wins the next U.S. election.

¶14. (U) S/P Director David Gordon did not have an opportunity to clear this message before departing Beirut.  
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